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INCOMING TELEGRAM

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P 111251Z DEC 78
FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO USICA WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8403
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UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 4201

USICA

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SECSTATE FOR ARA/CAR

E.O. 12065: NA
SUBJ: POST HANDLING OF U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA JONESTOWN COVERAGE

1. THE SLAYING OF CONGRESSMAN RYAN AND OTHERS AT PORT KAITUMA AND THE SUBEQUENT JONESTOWN TRAGEDY ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1978 TRIGGERED AN IMMEDIATE AND MASSIVE MEDIA INTEREST. THE INFLUX OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE U.S. AND OTHER COUNTRIES CREATED AN INSTANTANEOUS AND MONUMENTAL TASK FOR POST AND THE GOGG MINISTRY OF INFORMATION (MOI) WITH POST BEARING THE BRUNT OF THE REPORTERS' IRE AND IMPATIENCE, AS MOST OF THE VISITING MEDIA WERE AMERICANS. IN THE TWO WEEKS FOLLOWING THE TRAGIC INCIDENTS, POST FACILITATED THE WORK OF MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES, HOSTED TWO FORMAL PRESS BRIEFINGS AT USICA PREMISES, ARRANGED ANOTHER BRIEFING AT TIMEHRI AIRPORT WHERE THE U.S. JOINT TASK FORCE (USJTF) MADE ITS TEMPORARY COMMAND POST, HANDLED HUNDREDS OF MEDIA TELEPHONE CALLS AND RECORDED INTERVIEWS, PROVIDED BACKGROUND AND LOCAL INFORMATION FOR SCORES OF REPORTERS, COORDINATED WITH MISSION STAFF AND MILITARY PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS (MPIO) ON PRESS RELEASES AND OTHER PUBLISHABLE INFORMATION, ASSISTED MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES IN THEIR EFFORTS TO COLLECT NEWS MATERIALS FROM LOCAL SOURCES, ARRANGED SEVERAL BUS TRIPS FOR THE MEDIA TO COVER USJTF ACTIVITIES AT TIMEHRI AIRPORT, SUPPORTED AND FACILITATED THE WORK OF THE MOI IN ARRANGING A CHARTER FLIGHT TAKING 46 MEDIA PERSONS TO JONESTOWN, ARRANGED APPOINTMENTS WITH AMBASSADOR BURKE FOR ABOUT A DOZEN REPORTERS, AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST, PROVIDED REPORTERS WITH TELEPHONES, TYPEWRITERS, STATIONERY, AND OTHER FACILITIES WHICH ENABLED THEM TO FUNCTION IN GEORGETOWN WHERE THINGS ARE ALREADY DIFFICULT UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

2. PAO KIBBLE WAS CALLED TO THE EMBASSY AT 19:45 SATURDAY NOVEMBER 18, WHEN INITIAL REPORTS FROM PORT KAITUMA REACHED U.S. OFFICIALS. THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF A MARATHON WATCH, JOINED BY APAO SVENGSOUK AT 4:30 SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, WHICH CONTINUED ROUND THE CLOCK THROUGH DAWN TUESDAY NOVEMBER 21 AS THE MASSIVE PROPORTION OF THE JONESTOWN TRAGEDY WAS CONFIRMED BY U.S. OFFICIALS WHO WENT TO THE SCENE. DURING THIS FIRST PHASE, OUR MEDIA CONTACT WAS MOSTLY BY TELEPHONE WITH QUERIES COMING CONTINUOUSLY AT ALL HOURS FROM PLACES AS FAR DISTANT AS LONDON AND SYDNEY. DIFFICULTIES IN COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION WITH THE NORTHWESTERN REGION WHERE THE INCIDENTS TOOK PLACE PRESENTED A SENSITIVE AND DELICATE TASK FOR POST PERSONNEL IN TRYING TO COPE WITH MEDIA INSISTENCE FOR IMMEDIATE CONFIRMATION OF EVERYTHING THEY HEARD AND RECEIVED FROM OTHER SOURCES.

3. ACAO PATRICIA MOSER ARRIVED FROM CARACAS IN THE EARLY HOURS OF TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21, IN TIME TO ASSIST IN THE OPENING AND OPERATION OF A TEMPORARY "PRESS CENTER" AT THE GROUND FLOOR OF POST BUILDING. THE MAKESHIFT CENTER WAS IMMEDIATELY INNUNDATED WITH MEDIA PERSONS, WHO UNTIL THEN HAD NO PLACE TO USE AS A BASE FOR THEIR ACTIVITIES. FOR MANY OF THEM, THE PRESS CENTER WAS TO BECOME A HOME AWAY FROM HOME FOR A FEW DAYS. AT THE SAME TIME, ELEMENTS OF THE USJTF BEGAN TO ARRIVE AT TIMEHRI AIRPORT. ITS MPIO CAPTAIN JOHN MOSCATELLI VISITED THE PRESS CENTER WITHOUT DELAY, CONFERRED WITH PAO KIBBLE AND STAFF, AND WORKED OUT A STRUCTURED FORMAT TO INSURE THAT THE MOST TIMELY INFORMATION WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE MEDIA ON THE OPERATION OF THE USJTF IN DEALING WITH THE AFTERMATH OF THE JONESTOWN TRAGEDY.

4. AR MEDIA COORDINATOR FED SHAVER ARRIVED FROM WASHINGTON LATE TUESDAY EVENING, A FEW HOURS AFTER THE DECISION TO REMOVE ALL THE BODIES FROM JONESTOWN AND EVACUATE THEM TO THE U.S. WAS OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED WITH THE ACTUAL OPERATION COMMENCING WEDNESDAY, NOV. 22. ON WEDNESDAY, AS MEDIA PRESSED FOR TRIPS TO JONESTOWN, WHICH WERE NOT POSSIBLE DUE TO AREA HAVING BEEN DECLARED A HEALTH HAZARD BY GOG AND UNAVAILABILITY OF AIR TRANSPORTATION, THE POST DETERMINED THAT A PRESS BRIEFING WAS IN ORDER. SHAVER COORDINATED WITH MISSION OFFICERS AND MPIO IN ORGANIZING THE PRESS BRIEFING HELD AT THE PRESS CENTER AT 21:00 SAME DAY. THE BRIEFING WAS WELL ATTENEDE WITH REPRESENTATIVES L L MAJOR U.S. TELEVISON NETWORKS, NEWSPAPERS, AND WIRE SERVICES PRESENT. REPORTERS FROM ALL LOCAL RADIO STATIONS AND NEWSPAPERS WERE AMONG

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THE EIGHT ODD PERSONS AT THE PRESS BRIEFING. THE MORE THAN ONE HOUR SESSION WAS DESCRIBED BY MANY REPORTERS AS "STORMY," BUT IT SERVED TO DEFUSE MEDIA'S CHARGES THAT MISSION HAD BEEN "STONEWALLING." AS THE JONESTOWN OPERATION WENT INTO FULL SWING THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23, POST WORKED WITH MOI IN PROVIDING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND TRANSPORTATION FOR SCORES OF MEDIA PERSONS TO GO TO TIMEHRI AIRPORT, 25 MILES AWAY, ON FOUR DIFFERENT OCCASIONS.

5. ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24, AS REPORTS FROM THE USJTF INDICATED THAT THE ORIGINAL COUNT OF 400 BODIES WAS MUCH TOO LOW, THE MEDIA PRESSED FOR EXPLANATION. ANOTHER PRESS BRIEFING WAS CALLED TO INFORM THE MEDIA OF THE NEW SITUATION. THE SESSION WAS ALSO AS TURBULENT AS THE FIRST ONE. BUT IT PUT TO REST SPECULATIONS THAT HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE'S TEMPLE MEMBERS WERE HIDING IN THE DENSE JUNGLE SURROUNDING THE JONESTOWN SITE. SEVERAL REPORTERS ACCEPTED THE ERROR IN THE BODY COUNT AS AN HONEST MISTAKE. BY SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25, AFTERNOON, AS A JOLLY GREEN GIANT HELICOPTER CAME INTO TIMEHRI WITH THE LAST BATCH OF JONESTOWN VICTIMS' REMAINS, MEDIA COORDINATOR SHAVER AND APAO SVENGSOUK WERE THERE WITH A BUSLOAD OF REPORTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS. ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26, COVERAGE OF THE WINDING DOWN OF THE USJTF AND ITS IMMINENT WITHDRAWAL FROM GUYANA WAS ARRANGED BY POST FOR ABOUT 40 MEDIA PERSONS INCLUDING A REPORTER FROM THE NEW CHINA NEWS AGENCY. DETAILED REPORTS APPEARED IN ALL LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AND THERE WERE BROADCASTS WITH ACTUALITIES BY BOTH LOCAL RADIO STATIONS SAYING THAT U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL AND THEIR EQUIPMENT WERE INDEED LEAVING GUYANA FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF THEIR LIMITED MISSION. TDY OFFICERS SHAVER AND MOSER RETURNED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE POSTS ON THE SAME DAY AFTER HAVING GIVEN THIS TWO-OFFICER POST THEIR MUCH NEEDED AND MUCH APPRECIATED EXPERTISE, ENERGY, RESOURCEFULNESS AND PROFESSIONALISM, AT THE HEIGHT OF THE MEDIA INVASION OF GEORGETOWN.

6. MEDIA DEMAND TO VISIT JONESTOWN WAS FINALLY MET MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, WHEN MID SUCCEEDED IN RENTING A CHARTERED PLANE AND A HELICOPTER TO TAKE 46 MEDIA PERSONS TO THE DESERTED AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT. POST WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE FINAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE TRIP INCLUDING BUS TRANSPORTATION FOR THE GROUP TO AND FROM TIMEHRI AIRPORT. THE EXODUS OF THE VISITING MEDIA BEGAN OVER THE NEXT TWO DAYS. ALTHOUGH THE PRESS CENTER CEASED OPERATION OFFICIALLY ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, THE SEVERAL REMAINING REPORTERS WERE STILL

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ALLOWED TO USE THE SAME LOCATION AND FACILITIES FOR THEIR WORK.

7. MEDIA ATTENTION SINCE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, HAS BEEN FOCUSED ON SO CALLED "JONESTOWN SURVIVORS," AND THE GUYANESE AUTHORITIES LOCAL PROCEEDINGS AGAINST TWO MEMBERS OF THE CULT. POST HAS WORKED CLOSELY WITH U.S. CONSULATE TO KEEP MEDIA INFORMED OF PROGRESS OF THE REPATRIATION OF SURVIVORS WHO DESIRE TO RETURN TO THE U.S.

8. ALTHOUGH MEDIA INTEREST FOR THE BIZARRE AND SENSATIONAL ASPECTS OF JONESTOWN HAS TAPERED OFF, THIS HUMAN TRAGEDY OF UNPRECEDENTED PROPORTATIONS AND IMPACT WILL NOT FADE AWAY SOON. THEREFORE, POST ANTICIPATES THAT IN IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, JONESTOWN AND ITS WIDE-RANGING HUMAN, LEGAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS WILL CONTINUE TO ATTRACT THE INTEREST AND ATTENTION OF THE U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA OVERSHADOWING MUCH OF THE U.S. MISSION'S REGULAR ACTIVITIES IN GUYANA. POST IS MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO RETURN TO NORMAL, AND WILL KEEP AGENCY INFORMED OF THE EFFECT THAT THE AFTERMATH OF JONESTOWN MIGHT HAVE ON POST'S PROGRAMS. POST WOULD APPRECIATE ARS IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS ON THIS MATTER FROM WASHINGTON'S VANTAGE POINT AND PERSPECTIVES. KIBBLE

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